

As Chief Engineer for WUMB-FM, I was tremendously excited by the prospect of a second channel for program transmission. This factor is the primary reason that I lead the drive to make WUMB New England's first on-air HD Radio station in March of 2004.

One of the most difficult challenges we face at WUMB is finding enough hours in the day to schedule programming that addresses the needs of our existing listeners. Every month, during our popular, one-hour 'ask the managers' phone-in talk show, we invariably field requests from listeners who find a program to be scheduled at an inconvenient time. With a single program stream, a week of 168 hours isn't enough time to provide even one airing of all programs that are of interest to our listeners. A second audio stream solves both problems.

In addition, a second stream is a good place to start a new program, to give it time to grow and develop, without the very real financial pressures inherent in supporting the primary programming and transmission system.

WUMB's joint ventures with a number of community service organizations will benefit greatly from the availability of a second program stream. The Massachusetts Cultural Council is just one of the organizations that can enhance their community service mission through the use of a second program channel.

My vision for Supplemental Audio Channel (SAC) usage would be best supported by FCC approval of the new service, while allowing maximum flexibility for individual stations to make their own decisions for best utilization of the new service. For example, allowing SAC operation to be turned on and off at will, to allow extra-high audio quality on the main program stream during certain hours or certain programs is a decision that each station must control locally. SAC operation could also be turned on when not normally scheduled to be on, to allow coverage of breaking news or special events. SAC operation could also be used to provide two simultaneous audio programs associated with a single event, allowing differing viewpoints to be expressed.

I haven't been this excited by a new technology in years. HD Radio, with SAC capability, gives Public Radio a unique opportunity to double our service to the community without doubling our cost of operation. Second Audio Channel authorization is an idea whose time has come.